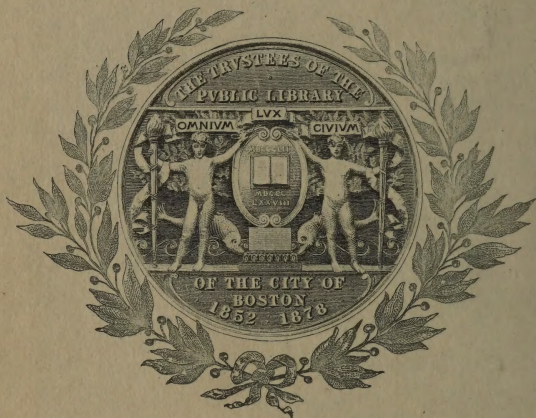




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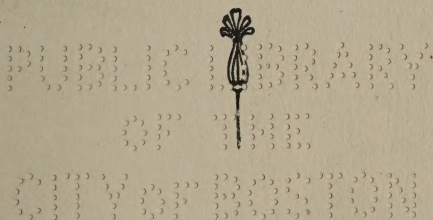
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# THE SINGER'S LADDER

Revealing the necessity of a serious  
approach to the most attractive  
and most difficult study  
in the world of art.

BY  
HERBERT WILBER GREENE

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NEW YORK  
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1920

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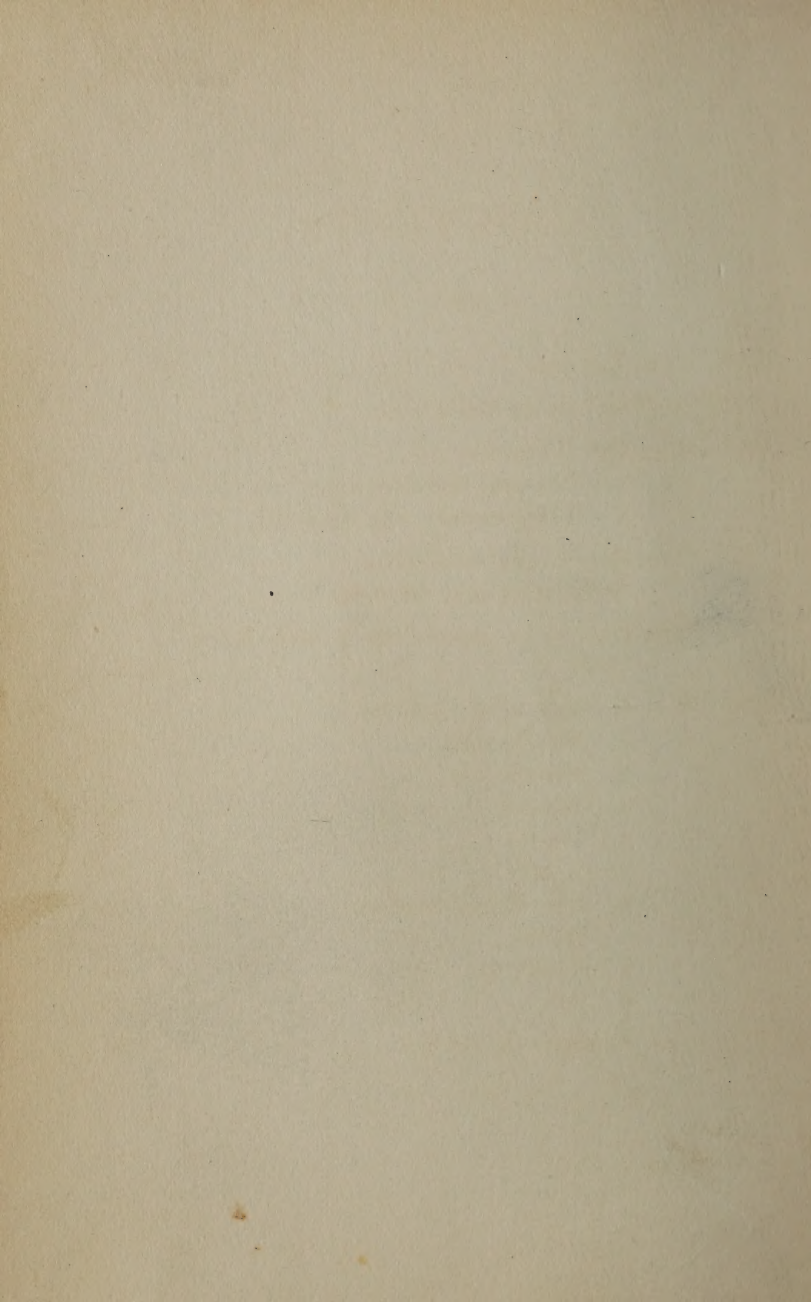
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## FOREWORD

**T**HIS book is intended to discourage students from entering upon the study of singing, if they have not sufficient talent to warrant the effort. Its purpose is to discourage students of singing, who have talent, but are afraid to work persistently and mightily; and to encourage students of singing who have a reasonable amount of talent and an unabating enthusiasm for work.

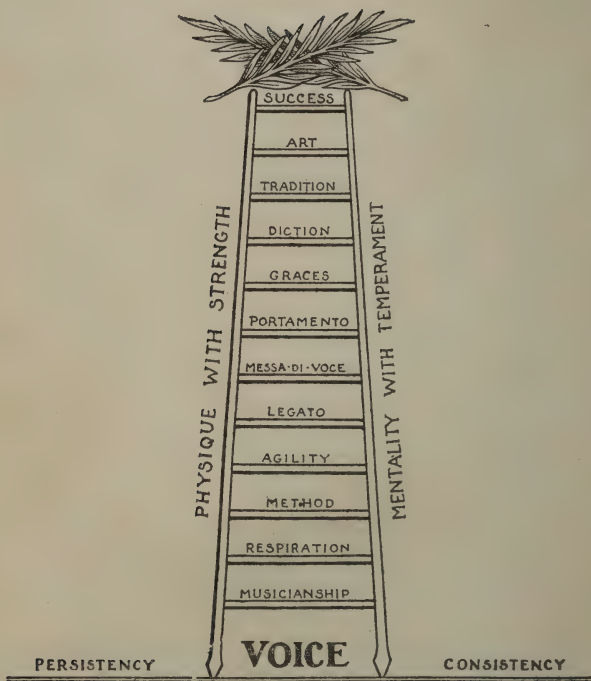


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## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTORY.

**M**OST musicians find that they began their growth in music with the supposition that classic models base their claim to immortality on their perfectness. Maturer knowledge reveals to them the truth that excellence, not perfection, is the key to distinction. Excellence is comparative, perfection is ideal. Excellence is a growth, perfection unattainable; hence, all aspirants for fame strive on a plane of equality so far as ends and aims go. The difference in inheritance clearly proscribes the horizon of the ambition.

Taking that idea as the starting point, all men are born with an equal chance to succeed, since he with the limited horizon must make as great an effort to reach its boundaries as the one with greater gifts, whose boundaries are thereby more or less extended. Ambition seems a vague term, but it carries with it its own objective and limitations. It cannot mean more to its possessor than can be comprehended by his power to conceive or appreciate.

If the student rhapsodizes over a Beethoven or a Wagner, and in the same breath wishes he could become as great, he invites the conclusion that he is fascinated by the spell of effect and the glamor of fame, which are purely sensual or selfish considerations. If the spirit of art personified by those masters has

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awakened an appreciative response in his soul, which must, through him, find expression, as it has found it through them, he talks little of ambition. The spell is too deep, too overpowering for words, and reveals itself slowly but surely through art's only medium of expression—works. The wise teacher, therefore, knows the comparative value of words and works, and fixes the limit of a pupil's attainments very early in their acquaintance.

Music is not a fickle muse. She offers no gratuities. Her emoluments are of the highest order, and are not only out of reach, but invisible to eyes unilluminated by consecration and submission to her exactions. Nature is her attribute of divinity; truth, of her character; and self-sacrificing fidelity the open sesame to her favor. He who would be great in art must be great in soul.

If this is true of the musician in the broad sense, it is not less true of one who seeks to win distinction as a singer. Objections may be urged to the claim that all vocalists have equal gifts, so far as the singing instrument is concerned; but the exceptions are so extremely rare where the physical gift of a superlatively beautiful voice has enabled its possessor to ignore the demands of musical and technical drudgery, that for all educational purposes, the combination of voice with the multitude of more important attributes, places ambitious vocalists on a level of opportunity at the initial stage of their efforts. They all must climb the same ladder,—the ladder of technic.



## INTRODUCTORY

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There are many books that attempt to point the way to artistic pre-eminence, but singing cannot be learned from books. Since singing is an art, and art is intangible, it persistently evades any attempt to reduce it to a formula. Books may agree or disagree as to what is most desirable, effective, or pertinent concerning any phase of its technical fundamentals, but let a writer attempt to instruct one as to how this art is to unfold its wings and soar into the atmosphere of the sublime, the pathetic, or the humorous, and his pen struggles vainly. Artists do not ride to fame on the literary airship. They climb to their high places laboriously, slowly, step by step. It is not so much our purpose to prescribe how the young and ambitious students of singing, in whom we are interested, should climb, as to enable them to gain a fair impression of the steps they must take in their ascent, if they would reach the high level of success.

By adopting the symbolism of a ladder, we are able to present to the student an orderly, if not conventional, sequence of the demands he must meet. This together with the necessary inherited equipment appears in so condensed a form that he need but glance at the ladder to realize that the duties confronting him are not imaginative pictures, but unyielding exactions.

## CHAPTER II.

### AN OUTLINE OF THE LADDER

FIRST, we have the conditions that must stand the strain. All depends upon the two uprights. One is **Physique with Strength**; the other, **Mentality with Temperament**. There have been many sad instances of failure because the bright mind and beautiful voice found shelter in a frail tabernacle. However, the strength peculiar to the art can be developed, if it has for its foundation the vigorous quality known as a sound constitution. The other upright—mentality with temperament—is that quality in the individual which can be best explained, when speaking of it subjectively, by the use of the words *receptive* and *impressionable*; and, when speaking objectively, by the words *expressive* and *impressive*. These two uprights—mental and physical—are of no use to the singer unless they be connected by the rounds of technic.

Next, we fasten into the lower ends of our two uprights two sharp metallic points; they denote steadfastness, the most valuable mental attribute. One is called Persistence, the other, Consistency; upon these must depend the stability of the structure, holding it firmly to the groove of its object. Persistence is valueless, unless qualified by Consistency. It were vain to persist in a pursuit that could not logically tend toward success; hence, Consistency must stand point to point

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with Persistence, because it is the quality that justifies Persistence.

Our ladder must rest upon the ground of Voice. It is the lowest, nearest the earth, most common among the gifts to men. A favorite quotation is from an Italian maestro, who said, speaking of the requirements for a singer: "There are three: the first is Voice, the second, Voice, and the third, Voice." That man lived before the era of the Wagnerian music-drama. He exalted gift above attainment; he placed the instrument above the mind that guides it. Voice is insignificant in itself, but can be made glorious by keeping it in its true relation to the culture of which it is the object.

With these conditions assured, we can begin to add the rounds to our ladder. The first and broadest of the rounds must be that of Musicianship. The day is past when a group of three persons may be referred to as "two musicians and a singer." The unmusicianly singer dare not even attempt to climb the ladder of fame.

The next round is Respiration. It has a round by itself, because it is a study by itself, to be pursued apart from the study of tone—it is in fact the advance guard, and properly developed, supports the vocal effort without in the least drawing the attention from tone-work.

The next round is Method, which is another name for a good tone. The master who gets from his pupils a good tone has the right method. A good tone can-



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not be throaty, guttural, nasal, unresonant, breathy, forced, or unnatural in any particular. It must extend evenly with the same effort and point throughout the entire compass; it must be delivered without fatigue for the same length of time that one could walk without fatigue; it must, in its perfection, be a delight to the ear. Such is the meaning of the term "Method."

Our next round is Agility. First, it is Nature's most natural tonic for the voice, giving a strength and dependability that can be gained in no other way; second, it is a tone-evenner, blending all parts of the compass into a homogenous whole; third, it is a vitalizer, giving brilliancy and point to the voice; fourth, it is a concentrator, bringing all possible groupings of broken chords and scales under the control of a single mental effort. Apart from tone placing, it is the most imperative of vocal requirements. Agility work is the singer's daily routine until he ceases to sing.

Tone is a thought-medium, and, however perfect, is empty until brought into a subjective relation to thought. Thought requires as its vehicle all the subtleties of light, shade, delicacy, elasticity, control and color.

Our succeeding rounds are there to meet those requirements. First comes the "Legato," the ultimate perfection of which marks the true artist with convincing emphasis; next, the "Messa di Voce," which covers every degree of stress; then, the "Portamento," answering to all the demands of elasticity. We now add the round of the "Graces." When brought to per-

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fection by study, they appear as a part of the phrase, rather than an interpolation. Thus, to do them and not overdo them is the test. The rules governing their use are largely traditional, and not only practice, but thought must be given to the work of perfecting them. The most important of them are the "Appoggiatura," the "Acciaccatura," the "Mordente," the various forms of "Grupetto," and the "Trill." Those who are discriminating know when they hear a singer attempt these graces of the art, how complete has been the sacrifice of selfishness and ease to ambition.

We now pass from the purely vocal resources of the singer to the interpretative. The first round in this group shall not be called "Expression": a weak term that may mean anything. A boy may cry with expression; a woman dances with expression; people even wink with expression; and one can sing with expression, and at the same time violate every rule of good breeding, and every law of art and instinct. This round shall be called "Diction." Diction deals with words as vehicles of thought; it covers all the intricacies of articulation, accent, suspension, color, dynamics, and phrasing. Let a man be given voice, and all that can be added to it by technic and culture, and he will yet stand or fall by his diction. It is here that the singer reveals to the wise and unwise alike the genuineness of his claim to distinction.

"Tradition" is ever present. It cannot be ignored; it is to be respected in text and score; it is the richest inheritance from the composers of oratorio and opera,

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next to the works themselves. Fortunate the artist who is selected to create a role, for it is he who, through his knowledge of the composer's wishes, establishes the tradition of the work for all time, and bold indeed is the singer who trespasses wantonly upon the ideals of him who wrote the music.

We will add another round, and call it "Art". It represses the over-emotional nature; it quickens the sluggish heart; it enlists the sympathy of its auditors with discretion; it softens rough places, and intensifies weak moments in the composer's work, without impairing the consistency of his thought. In short, it is justly the fitting quality to stand as a climax to the requirements which precede it and, more than any of the rest, if not more than all of them, does it make possible the final round of our ladder, to the height of which I hope many who study its construction will climb. Its name is Success.



## CHAPTER III.

### THE TWO UPRIGHTS

#### SECTION ONE: PHYSIQUE WITH STRENGTH

IT is quite indisputable that singers who are advanced in the art are models of health and physique. The singer's title to a long life is fully established. Yielding to the enticements attending a successful career sometimes precipitates a failure in health, but should these causes be eliminated, statistics would show that the longevity of the singing artist would take first place among the professions. Physicians not infrequently advise the parents of children who are frail or have improperly developed physiques to send them to singing masters for instruction, quite regardless of the gift of a voice.

The secret of the singer's health lies in the fact that through the exercise of his profession, he makes active two life-giving agents to an extent that cannot be employed with equal thoroughness by any system of exercises or modes of treatment yet extant. These two influences would have precisely the same effect upon the health of individuals who never sang, if it were possible to place them in motion by any other process. These health-giving factors are Vibration and Oxygen.

By looking through the advertising pages of the magazines, we find numerous descriptions of instru-

ments called vibrators. They are devices for producing a quick succession of disturbances, undulations, or shocks upon and near the surface where they are applied. Some are made active by an electric current and some by mechanical means. The purpose is to increase the activity of circulation in the places treated, thereby dissipating congestion or inflammation, giving to the tissues firmness and vigor. Vocal tone, rightly produced, is a vibrator, and of the most valuable sort. The artificial vibrating devices bear no comparison with voice for effectiveness and permanence. Being machines, their vibrations are of equal speed and violence, and the sphere of their immediate influence is limited to the size of the part of the machines which comes in contact with the body.

In many cases, such instruments admirably serve the purpose for which they are designed. But the voice instrument excels them in many particulars, among which are: variety in the speed of the vibrations, constant change in their stresses, normality of action, and, more potent than all, the large area of their influence. In proof of which, let a person place one hand firmly upon the sternum of the chest of a singer in action, and the other upon the apex of the skull and the resultant tone vibrations will not only be distinctly projected to both hands, but all of the changes in speed and violence, will be clearly discernible. Indeed, this phenomenon of vocal sound is so marked that it is used successfully by those who teach the deaf

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to speak, as a guide for their pupils to determine the pitch of their voices.

The methods of applying these two forms of health-giving vibrators should also be compared. The natural or vocal form is far superior, because it can be used with good effect through increasingly long intervals. The mechanical form can be safely used but a few moments at a time, and is liable to induce soreness, if allowed to remain in action too long in one place. The tone vibration, while gentle, is far-reaching in its effects. As used by vocalists in their daily routine of practice and singing, it accomplishes wonders in building up tissue, strengthening the muscles of the throat, neck, chest, and head, and giving to the associating nerves a responsiveness that can be gained by no other process.

Oxygen is the other factor that produces so marked an effect on the health of singers. Let us not call it breathing, lest those who have been cloyed with the subject turn away in disgust. It is the superabundance of oxygen that the singer receives, whether he will or not, that enriches his blood, filling it with the germ-destroying red corpuscles, giving tone to the stomach, strength to the heart, vigor to the mind, and vitality to the whole body. Oxygen is kept too much in the background by the many writers upon the subject of deep breathing. Deep breathing is much oxygen, much oxygen is health, and, as administered to the body through the act of singing, eventually de-

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stroys all that is harmful, and supplies all that is life-giving and helpful.

Take for example, a systematic student, or a professional vocalist. In the two hours of daily singing, one is compelled to breathe into the blood four times the amount of oxygen he would in ordinary respiration. An equivalent of breathing eight hours instead of two, with six hours left to add to the already valuable surplus. Singers do this and more every day. Is it surprising that they gain in weight, in health and in spirits, and that when one sees a successful singer, he sees a person of robust health and physique?

Those who are enamored of the singing art should be twice glad. First, conscious that they are pursuing a congenial and lucrative profession; second, that its pursuit is the most agreeable form of health insurance yet discovered. It must be remembered that the robust artists of whom we have spoken were students once, many of them slim and without endurance. Their success did not come without much sacrifice. Work in the ordinary acceptance of the term never made a great singer. Many hours daily of assiduous practice and study, carried forward through a number of years, was necessary to insure control, endurance, and artistic as well as physical health. It is not, therefore, the vibration and oxygen resulting from a few weeks of desultory study that establishes the physique of the vocalist, but the continued and systematic employment of those forces.



In this connection, we recall the opinion very vehemently expressed by G. Sbriglia, of Paris, the teacher of Plancon, the de Reszkes, and other famous artists, that the vitality of the singer is a vitality peculiar to the demands of the singing art. He repudiated every form of exercise such as running, wrestling, horse-back riding, tennis, etc., as making demands upon the physique of the singer which should be held in exclusive reserve for the singing act. He urged that the subtle demand upon the physique made by vocalization was a law unto itself, and could in no wise be violated with impunity. Yet, such is the beneficent influence of this form of physical development, that almost invariably the physique of the singer is notably more perfect than is to be found in any other profession, and perhaps, it is well to add that the statistics reveal the fact that, other things being equal, the singer leads all professions on the score of longevity.

In view of this, shall we endorse the physician's course in prescribing vocal work for frail bodies? Yes, under two conditions. First, they must know of a teacher upon whom they can depend, one who understands the needs of such a pupil, and, who can inspire him with such a love for and interest in the work that they will combine to keep him studying until an impetus is given to the health that will feed its own momentum; and, again, yes, if there is, as a basis for

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such industry, a modicum of voice, and a normal appreciation of music. Nothing is more certain than that health is benefited in exact proportion to the intelligent use of the voice.

## CHAPTER III. (Continued)

### SECTION TWO: TEMPERAMENT WITH MENTALITY

SINGING students are quite unconscious of how greatly they influence their teacher's mode of procedure. After a few lessons, pupils fall quite naturally into one of two groups. For those in one group, the teacher will use the lead pencil most freely; for the other, pencilled instructions are the exception. The former, while mechanical, often sing fairly well, if well taught.

Those of the unpencilled group are the teacher's delight. The master suggests, he inculcates principles, leaving it for the pupil to apply them. Instead of saying: "You must crescendo here," he leads the pupil to feel by his comment that the crescendo must be made there. The thought, the word and the music combine to demand it, and the effect would be feeble, if the pupil did not respect those demands.

If the teacher fails after many attempts to rouse the pupil to an understanding of the right and value of his own initiative, he recognizes the case as hopeless, resorts to the lead-pencil, and concentrates on making the pupil as good an imitative artist as possible.

Vocal students are apt to look upon their teachers and the artists whom they admire as demigods, accepting everything they do and say as unimpeachable. They attempt only to imitate them, disregarding

entirely differences in voice, physique, temperament, training or environment, which should at least qualify their value as models.

The unthinking pupil can rarely be brought into the class of the thinking pupil. The teacher's most difficult problem is to know how to be sure to which group the student belongs. Pharaoh compelled the Israelites to make bricks without straw; the fact that they accomplished it shows that it was possible. And it is quite as likely that the pencil, which is the substitute for the pupil's thought, can develop an art edifice that will be satisfactory to the pupils themselves and their not too discriminating audiences.

Learning to depend upon one's self in singing is not unlike cultivating the imagination. We begin by reading "Mother Goose" to children in the nursery, and telling them well-selected ghost stories when they are old enough to join the circle by the fire-side. To cultivate originality in the boy, we give him a box of tools and a board, and tell him to make something; to the girl, we give the needle and thread, and the yard of cloth and trimming. Thrown upon its own resources, the mind begins to work, and something may result.

To the adult student of singing, we give the notes, words and voice, and tell him to project the thought intelligently and convincingly, but in his own way. Rising above the purely technical restrictions which have been so large a part of his training, he asserts



himself, conscious that he must acknowledge defeat or win a victory. Efforts of this kind, wisely and kindly criticised by the master, will bring him to realize that he, and not the teacher, must possess the real impetus to success. A song, recitative, or aria thought out in every detail, and rendered in answer to that thought, is the best discipline for originality that we know.

How closely is temperament allied to mentality? The New York critics are becoming fond of using the term "intellectual temperament," which well describes the most desirable phase of the subject. An intellectual singer will not gush, or descend to the level of mere sentimentalism. His conception of the art is not restricted by its technic. His appeal, through the medium of the voice, is made with dignity and understanding. His effect upon the heart is through the mind, rational and elevating. He does not believe that the object of music is to enrich sentiment, but to enlist it to the glorification of art. Hence, the basis of his musical appeal is Thought, not Sound.

From the standpoint of the singer, we convey, by using the word, temperament, the simple and direct impression of power, first to feel, and second, to inspire that feeling in others. Can it be developed? Upon this question, more than all others, depends the success of the student of singing. It is upon this point that experience seems sometimes to contradict itself. This problem confronts the teacher whenever he is held responsible for the career of a student with a

promising voice. Here his power is put to the test. He deals, not with muscles or theories, nor even with tone or its quality, but far more deeply must he descend into the realm of spirit and its control.

In one case, the teacher would find the spirit of the student asleep. He may waken it to the right receptivity, making it alert to the beauty or the sublimity of the thought under consideration—a live, spiritual fire, which, though it burns in him, he may be unable to inspire him to kindle it in others.

Again, when the sense seems dull to the truths in the lines of a song, the act of singing seems to enkindle into flame, and make vivid the thought. In another case, the soul, the spirit, the nerves and body seem to blend in one profound response to the message in the lines, overpowering the singer to the point of pain; then, the teacher's efforts must be exercised to balance and make steady the student until he can curb his expression, and hold himself within bounds by technical control.

And, finally, how often is the teacher confronted with the mind that grasps, but yields not, with the heart that beats, but throbs not, with the eyes that dilate, but weep not, with the spirit that yearns, but melts not—the soul which is like a mirror, with only the power to reflect, which with all the consummate blandishments of art, with unlimited grace and attainment, absorbing, apparently all that is good, expressive, true, and beautiful from the minds of both the composer and writer, yet gives to the listener only the

picture of the truth, and not the truth itself. Truly it is a significant question: can temperament be cultivated or developed?

(Temperament is a matter of the soul; it can be cultivated and deepened; the imagination can be quickened. But an affirmative answer to that question does not altogether meet our needs. There is yet another quality to be considered, more potent, it would appear, than the rare possession of a fine temperament. Indeed, this quality is at times most deceptive, giving the impression of a depth of appreciation, which does not at all exist. It is that peculiar ability to project or give forth the thought which controls.

Appreciation of beauty, and consciousness of truth, the spell of passion, or the helplessness of hope, are all subjective qualities, susceptible of growth and intensification. The power of projecting or identifying the thoughts of others with your own, is, to a much less degree capable of development, more generally a gift, an inheritance. There are rare cases, where these attributes have seemed to be wanting, but were only asleep, and under the stress of some sudden power or experience, have blossomed forth into life and intensity at almost a moment's warning. This has given rise to that fallacious and unfortunate proverb among thoughtless teachers and students, that to sing well, one must suffer much—the most dangerous, the most detestable, the most demoralizing, the most humiliating and soul-belittling proposition that was ever fostered under the ensign of art.

A famous scholar has made the assertion that the greatest gift in art is the power to work. He allows no discrimination between genius and talent, between gift and acquisition. He may be right theoretically; we are not so bold as to dispute him, because the time is not ripe for a conclusive test of the question. A study of the situation reveals that most of the great singers have achieved distinction in response to a call which they had not the power to resist.

Much has been said of the monetary allurements of the singing profession, but the truth is that neither lust for fame nor greed for gold can compare for a moment with the joy of attainment, the consciousness of power, the satisfaction of influence through expression, the simple unfeigned delight of singing out of one heart into another. These are all that are necessary as incentives to labor and self-sacrifice, without which, who ever became a brilliant artist?



## CHAPTER IV.

### THE POINTS OF THE LADDER

#### PERSISTENCE AND CONSISTENCY

MUCH has been written of the qualifications for a teacher, and, much, in an indefinite way, of the qualifications for good scholarship; but, in the field of voice study, more particularly than anywhere else, is there excellent reason for presenting certain phases of the subject with great definiteness. Young people attending school have not only their regular hours for recitation, but provisions are also made for regular hours of study. After they leave school and enter college, these hours are extended; aside from the absolute regularity of the recitation periods, and the opportunities for study within the college walls, the demands are just as exacting at home or in the dormitories, both day and evening.

The students in our universities who maintain a good standing, devote ten hours a day to mental work, either in preparation or recitation, and sustain that pressure six days in the week, not infrequently finding it necessary to encroach upon the seventh. Such are the demands upon the student by the curricula of schools in general. The authorities know this; the governing boards, instead of feeling that the mind is overburdened, are constantly raising the standards, and making the requirements more severe. Such, at

a glance, are the conditions to which the aspirant for honor, or even those who would save themselves from dishonor, must subscribe.

How about the student of music? It is not surprising, considering the efforts made for its attainment, that music has no rating with the other arts or professions. This is judging, of course, by the manner in which it is approached by those who consider it seriously.

There are, it may be urged, two obstacles to continuous vocal effort—physical limitations, and the meagreness of material available for concentrative study. Neither claim is tenable. History affords proof that **wisely-guided** vocal study may occupy six or eight hours daily, with no approach to the danger point in its effect on the voice. And the available material which is of value to every student of the voice, could keep him employed through many years of study.

Considering the reasonableness of these facts, let us assume that one half of the time that university students devote to their work would be adequate for the student of singing—say, five hours a day. How many vocal students devote five hours a day to the serious study of their art, or in work that has a direct bearing upon it?

Classifying students by their abilities and opportunities, we find three groups ample for our needs. In the first class may be placed those who have a fondness as well as talent for the art, and are employed during the business hours of the day. This class acts

from necessity rather than choice, and can study only irregularly or insufficiently. In the next group, we may place the more or less talented young men and women who occupy good positions socially and are able to give as much money and time as they may elect to the pursuit, the object usually being to add to their accomplishments. (Third, and last, those who, because they have voices of promise, reinforced by talent and ambition, are devoting their entire time to the art of singing, with a view either to professional associations or a career.) It is to this class that the writer addresses himself.

We cannot consider the first class, because, while their intentions may be serious, the circumstances are such that a rule cannot well be established which will meet their varying needs. Nothing is more necessary to the young than recreation. Young men or women engaged in school work or business may be ambitious as well as talented, but after a day devoted to business or study, they should have recreation. The two most important requirements for successful voice-study—vitality and keenness of mind—must be impaired by their work. Their gifts may, in some instances, be so rare, and the demands made upon them in their daily vocations so slight, that they will eventually arrive at a point where it would be possible for them to relinquish everything but their vocal work. Such examples naturally fall under the head of the third classification.

From the second into the third class, we can hardly

expect any recruits, as those who study the vocal art as an accomplishment, rarely trouble themselves with more than a superficial treatment of the question; though from this group there have been instances where an over-mastering love for the work has been developed, and what promised to be only a delightful accomplishment proved to be the serious life-work. Adding such examples to our group three, let us now discuss their opportunities and their obligations. We may take many individual students, and each one will unquestionably represent hundreds of others, who, with scarcely any deviation, may be said to do likewise.

First example—Miss A. has a good voice and an excellent teacher. Her lesson hour is from 11:30 to 12:00 Tuesdays and Fridays. When she has finished her breakfast Monday morning, she seats herself at the piano and sings, for half an hour, scales, vocalises, and other exercises—rests her voice; later another half-hour devoted to her repertory. After lunch, some time in the afternoon, another half-hour of exercises and an hour of repertory. In the evening perhaps a half hour on her repertory, and some serious vocal gymnastics again. Almost any part of the morning, afternoon, or evening satisfies her, if the time allotment is consumed. On Tuesdays and Fridays, the system is much the same, with the exception of the lesson, when she omits one of the half-hours for practice in the morning, carrying this system throughout the week. This young woman is satisfied that she



is doing all that the teacher requires of her, practising all that is necessary, and making all the progress that can be expected.

Without going further into detail, and with only unimportant modifications, this is the way in which two-thirds of the seriously-minded young women and men go about their vocal work. It would be possible to grade a series of illustrations, adding to each as we advanced, fresh evidences of a better system and increasing intelligence, in economy of strength until the ideal student were reached; but one example will suffice.

Perfection in art cannot be found between the two extremes of undeveloped gifts and adequate preparation. There is no middle path to success. The best that is attainable by one who has a voice and the opportunity to cultivate it, is his only definition of success.

Second example: Miss B. has also a good voice and a safe teacher. She realizes that her voice is of money-earning excellence, and that with careful development for a year or two, it can be made to carry the expense of its further training. She has been shown that every action of her daily living has a more or less direct influence on her voice; therefore, her life is governed by a carefully adjusted schedule. First, her health and physique are considered. To lessen the tendency to colds, she steps from her bed into the cold plunge, and rubs herself into a glow. A glass of cold water tones up her stomach, and she

is ready for a light breakfast of fruit, cereal, toast and very weak coffee. She persists in this regime, varying only the kinds of fruit and cereal. She is in good condition for practice early in the day, and no undue draught is made upon her vitality by the process of digestion. Rain or shine, she walks in the open air full two half-hours, and does a mile and a half each time. It is fairly brisk walking but to her it is not fatiguing. The hearty meal of the day is at twelve or one o'clock—never at night. If she is to be an artist, this will be a necessity, and it is better to adapt the system to it from the beginning. Her evening meal is light, with no meat nor hot bread. This system of diet which she has adopted is not severe. There are no restrictions as to the noon meal. She knows that the singer gets more nutrition and greater vitality from a little food than from much. It is most important that the hours for meals are regular, and, living by schedule, she controls this.

The career of a singer, to be ideal, comprehends proportionate development. She must know the languages, she must play well upon the piano, she must arrive through practice to a perfect control of the vocal instrument. She must know the literature of her specialty, she must know what she will be required to learn as repertory, and begin to get it into her voice and memory. Miss B. understands these requirements, and she has adjusted her study schedule to meet them. There are four thirty-minute periods of vocal practice, three of them on technic; two hours of

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## THE POINTS OF THE LADDER

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study on the languages, interspersed in a way that best conserves the vitality of the voice; an hour each devoted to the piano and the study of musical theory or literature. By this schedule, six hours a day are regularly passed in study. We have not appointed for her the half hour of light physical exercises, the major part of which are done with a view to increasing respiratory control, or the half-hour or more of singing in the evening, if opportunity for concerts or opera do not present themselves.

Thus she studies every day. Her lessons are included in her regime. She insists upon its maintenance so rigorously that only most important occurrences are allowed to interfere with it. She has her piano in her room, to be secure against interruptions from the family or callers. Her friends call only by appointment.

Miss B. is the ideal vocal student. There are many young students in America to-day who recognize the necessity for an undeviating system as a legitimate means to an end. The human voice responds best to demands that are made upon it at regular intervals; therefore the clock is a most important factor. It requires absolute perfection of physical condition for satisfactory results, and such conditions cannot be guaranteed without strict loyalty to certain forms of diet, exercise, bathing, sleeping, and dressing.

The example I have quoted is a real living student. She lives on scores of streets in New York, and on as proportionately a large number of streets in every



important city or town. She is leaving the desultory, though perhaps earnest student far behind her; she is singing the solos in the large city churches, while the unsystematic or indefinite student remains at home, and fails to understand why she is not placed. With systematic living, comes good health and spontaneity in work. With promising gifts and a good teacher, success is no more problematic than in any other gilt-edged investment.

Are the physical or mental problems in vocal music any less intricate than those in law or medicine or any other profession? How many vocal students are looking forward to an uninterrupted course of six years' study? Do I discourage you by showing you its difficulties frankly and clearly? If so, you are dishonoring my profession. Shall we yield the palm to any profession on the score, either of the difficulty of its attainment or the value of its emoluments? I cannot deceive you; you cannot deceive yourselves. Ours is the most enjoyable, the most ennobling, the most elevating of the arts; the best worth working for, the most difficult of attainment. Shall we enter the field blind to these facts?

Schumann ends his rules for young musicians with this pregnant remark: "There is no end of learning." Edward Everett says that the "safe path to eminence and success is diligent application to learn the art, and assiduity in practicing it." Richter once said: "I have made as much of myself as could be made of the stuff, and no man should require more." Let any student

say that to himself after five years of the most conscientious efforts, and I will assure him that he has put down the cement, on which to lay a sure foundation. Beethoven said: "Knowledge can only be acquired by unwearying diligence." Who could know better than he?

"How does she do it?" is often breathed in whispers of suppressed admiration when an artist has held the hearer spellbound by the consummate skill with which the number was sung. Winterfield answers the question in these few words: "Art only reveals her deepest secrets to those who cling to her with true self-denial." I might multiply quotations, but none could emphasize the poignant necessity of persistence better than the last one. Art's deepest secrets are those which, when once gained by the student, reward him with a crown all resplendent, not with jewels, but with a light from within, only the reflection of which dazzles the world, and the people exclaim: "Behold a genius."

Is it consistent to expect acclaim as an artist until perfection is approached through persistence? Thus the art structure must rest squarely upon two points; Persistence in the effort; Consistency in making the effort.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE GROUND ON WHICH THE LADDER RESTS—VOICE

PRACTICAL and theoretical knowledge differ widely. Theory reduced to practise is experimental; knowledge evolved from practice is scientific. Knowledge of the every-day acts of life, such as walking breathing, or speaking, is usually limited to a consciousness of the act itself. Definite mental intent and guidance preceding the act is a step in advance. Let the mental act or attitude be a motive which has arisen or been formed from an acquaintance with the conditions which are combined to make the practical act possible; let this be applied in practice, and we have an example of the highest type of culture in all arts where physical and mental training are interdependent. It is quite clear that things with which we are familiar are frequently those of which we have the least theoretical knowledge. This is as often true in our intercourse with people as in the pursuit of art knowledge. We may, for instance, be on terms of easy familiarity with a person, and yet have very little insight into his character; and in fact, the only thing that would prompt us to look deeply into his character would be something out of character.

We find that he who knows most about his own voice is one who has had some disease of the throat, or difficulty in using his voice, and has been roused to a study of the causes thereof. Nearly everyone has

a voice, and since it is continually in use, he may be said to be on terms of familiarity with it. But how few, even of those who use it for speaking or singing, understand the principles of its use, the correct means by which the greatest results can be obtained, or even the proper care of it.

Put yourself to the test in this matter by mentally answering some of the following questions: What is voice? What constitutes the elementary difference between voice in song and voice in speech? What is meant by the registers of a voice? Is such a distinction legitimate? What is the real anatomical basis for such a question? What are the names of the principle vocal organs? What do you know of their construction, their uses, and relative importance? Wherein do authorities differ? Who are the authorities?

You have awakened perhaps to the understanding that there is something besides the mere act and art of singing that every intelligent vocalist is at least privileged to know. Among those who are educating themselves in the vocal profession, there is as strong a likelihood that they will become teachers as singers. Hence, it is important that a definite knowledge of the physiological phenomena accompanying tone production should be gained. It is important to acquire this at a point in the study when theory and practice will not exert conflicting influences.

A man who is ill calls his physician, who prescribes for him. The physician does not lecture the patient

on anatomy, surgery, or general practise, but attacks, instead, the disease. On the other hand, if a man wishes to study medicine, or to note the effect of certain methods of treatment, he ceases to be the passive subject in the hands of the expert, and becomes active in his attitude towards medical practice. So, with vocal students; voices under development are imperfect; they require either purifying, placing, or strengthening, none of which processes demands an intimate knowledge of scientific theory on the part of the student.

In the hands of the skilful master, the results will usually be, as in the case of the patient, more direct, if the prescribed treatment is followed, unmindful of the reasons which are the basis of that treatment. Once the voice is placed, however, and the pupil has been cured by the teacher—in other words, has surmounted the problem of how to produce a tone correctly, which means naturally and easily, it would be highly commendable, should he evince an interest in the theories underlying the results which are so satisfactory to him; and not only commendable, but necessary, should he entertain the ambition to instruct. When the physician accepts the young aspirant for medical honors, he seats him in his office, and plans a course of reading which is the basis for his practical advancement.

So, those who desire further light on the mechanics and theories of tone-production, consult the great



authorities, who treat each branch of the many-sided subject in exhaustive detail.

Thoughtful teachers applaud freedom of discussion, and often entertain views on questions of importance quite opposed to those of their equally thoughtful confreres. So also will progressive students. Reading will furnish them material with which to prove or disprove many perplexing things in their own experience. Specialists do not cover the entire range of observation. Even the subjects which they have examined and upon which they have written are presented differently by different writers, because they have approached with preconceived ideas, difficult of dislodgment, and it is no less certain that observant students will find in their experience some points not in harmony with accepted theories. While this may not prove authorities in error, it may prove that most voices in some particulars present exceptions to rules, and open their eyes to the fact that in voice, more than in any branch of study, rules depend upon their exceptions for verification. This points plainly to the truth that the teacher who has the greatest latitude, both in his experience and adaptability, will attain to the highest averages.

Look well then to all opportunities for the development of the perceptive faculties; read such authorities as Pierce, Rush, McKenzie, Guilmette, Seiler, etc., all of which are to be found in well-appointed libraries.

As the painter seeks the subject matter for his pictures from nature itself, and judges the merit of his

work by its fidelity to the unchanging truths of nature, so must the vocal artist recognize nature as a fundamental principle of his art. Unfortunately, the voice teacher is rarely allowed the felicity of beginning his work with nature. He must take the material upon which he has to work, and by ingenuity or artifice, coax it back to its natural condition. All correct voice development must begin with nature. By that I mean that the condition in which the voice was intended to do its work must be obtained. The body must be free and unhampered in every way so that the voice may be used naturally, without tension of any kind, uninjured by straining or a physical effort to increase quantity or range.

The influences which surround a voice are usually so opposed to the freedom of tone and perfection of quality, which is the charm of all true artistic voices, that one rarely meets with a voice, which does not demand, in its earlier stages, laborious treatment in the retrograde. Much that is done either in study or through habits of carelessness, resulting in unnatural effort, must be undone.

Having arrived at the natural voice, which is the true singing instrument, let us look a little into tone. A vocal tone comprehends three distinct component factors, all interrelated, which must be maintained in perfect balance, both in the process of development and final adjustment. This triad of requirements is:

1. A motive power or point of propulsion.
2. A vibrator, or point of vibrating activity.

### 3. A resonator, or point of delivery.

The muscles of respiration are the motors; the vocal bands are the vibrators, while the vocal cavities and the bones of the head are the resonators or sounding boards.

To secure the best results, the motors must be under perfect control, able to hold in poise sufficient breath to act on the vibrators (the vocal bands) while in their perfectly unhampered and receptive condition, and in such a manner as to leave the mind free to direct the vibration to the varying points of resonance. If the motor acts too powerfully, the vibrator is strained in its effort to utilize all the air directed upon it. If the vibrator is overburdened, it is impossible to direct the tones to their points of delivery. If the point of delivery is not acted upon directly and naturally, the tone loses its acoustic properties. Hence, a perfect balance between the parts is necessary to the highest efficiency.

Let us follow our triad of requirements in other instruments. In all instruments, at least one of the triad is controlled by the mind of man—namely, the motor force.

In the violin, we find the frame is the resonator, and the application of the bow to the strings reveals the point of vibration; we go outside of the instrument for the motor, which is the arm of the player. In the pianoforte, the strings are the vibrators, the sounding-board the resonator, but the keys are not the motors; hands guided by the intelligent will are the

motors. And so through the entire range of instruments, none are complete or become sentient without an addition of the motive power of man, and as he perfects the balance between the vibrator and the resonator so are the highest results obtained. A definite mechanical adjustment is, however, necessary to alter in any degree the fixed quantities of vibrator and resonator in all instruments except the voice. The voice is the king of instruments, because in it not the motor power alone, but also the vibrator and resonator are directly subject to the command of man.

As the vocal bands are tensed or relaxed, the tone is made correspondingly brilliant or dull in pitch or quality, often governed by instinct alone. Even more intuitively do the hollow spaces of the mouth, throat, and head respond to the demand for variety in beauty and tone color. That quality of tone susceptibility above mentioned as instinct or intuition places the vocal instrument as far above the mechanically made instrument as the spirit transcends the body.

We mentioned above a triad of requirements. The question might naturally arise, and, indeed, there is no question which arises more frequently, can everyone sing? Granted that a person has a perfectly developed and efficient motive power, a healthy, normal, vibrator, and unimpaired resonators, and, combined with these three requirements, a love of singing, can he sing? And, if not, why not? Does not a negative answer imply a fourth requirement? To which we answer: The triad of requirements was

evolved as necessary to voice, not to **singing**. A good voice is not synonymous with good singing. We do not agree with the Italian maestro whom we quoted above as saying that three things were necessary for singing, voice and voice and voice, and, believing that there is an element more vital than voice in the art of singing, we hold that the answer to the question, can everyone sing, can be found only on a plane outside the physical. Because one yields to the fascinations of singing, and the vocal cords are there reinforced by healthy normal resonance chambers, it does not follow that the ability to make them a true vehicle of artistic expression is there.

How rich a gift is that of a voice! How marvelous its possibilities in growth and development! How direct in its influence! How adaptable to every mood and need of man! How true a mirror of the soul! How jealous of care, and rebellious when abused! Surely he who sings, and sings in a spirit of consecration to his art, is entitled to the place he holds in the affections of the people. It is by undisputed right that he takes possession for a time of the most secret places in our hearts. How much greater the satisfaction in listening to a voice, when one is conscious that he who possesses the key to our Holy of Holies is worthy of our silent homage. When he enters, it is with reverence; when he has gone, he has left a pleasant memory, which links us, not only to the



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singer, but to the spirit speaking through him, of the sublimity of art; of the graciousness of God who made art the blessed medium through which we can catch real glimpses of His matchless benignity.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE ROUNDS OF THE LADDER

#### SECTION ONE: MUSICIANSHIP

SINGERS as a class are accused of being execrable musicians, and not unjustly in many instances. It is a noteworthy fact that few great singers have become great composers. This is not so much due to the neglect of important fundamental studies as to the absorbing exactions of the vocal art. Temptation to do only the thing that makes a good showing is greater among singers than other musicians, the reason being that a voice, if at all above the ordinary, attracts attention or gives pleasure to many who would not think the showing in instrumental music that had been acquired by an equal expenditure of time, at all worth listening to. To yield to this temptation, which is so normal in accompaniment of gifts that excite comment, is not commendable, and is a stumbling-block to all who are not wisely guided in their earlier studies.

“How well do you read?” This is an important question; almost a momentous one. It confronts all young singers. It is an entirely safe assertion that there are not ten excellent readers in every one hundred professional singers. By that, I mean those who can read music at sight with the same fluency with which they can read the pages of a book. Indeed, sight-readers are so rare, that such an accomplish-

ment is widely commented upon. Those who are less capable as readers attribute the success of those who read well to exceptional gifts or fortunate early training. This is not a self-evident fact. Any observant teacher will testify to the fact that the power to read anything and everything at sight is attainable by those whose musical gifts are not above the ordinary.

For the encouragement of many who feel that unless the battle has been half won for them by inheritance, the prize is not worth the effort, let me cite a case, the details of which are entirely authentic. A young man living in the country found himself possessed of a pleasing tenor voice, and being desirous of profiting by it, attempted to connect himself with a quartet choir, but was met with a refusal, because he could not read at sight. He was not the type of man to be discouraged by obstacles, so went diligently about his task. He had no aptitude in judging intervals, knew nothing of the piano or organ, therefore depended upon one or two books of musical notation, and his tuning fork. He studied the old "Lowell Mason's Movable Do Method," and worked at it for a year, devoting a part of every evening to it. At the end of that time, it was impossible to put anything before him that he could not read accurately by the use of the syllables, almost as rapidly as a prima donna would sing the agility passages in an aria. It was some months before he was able to use the text instead of the syllables and still read with the same rapidity; but in a year and a half, by dint of hard

work, he became the most perfect reader it has been my pleasure to meet in the profession. This man cannot qualify on the score of musicianship. Nevertheless the ability to accurately conceive interval distances was perfected.

The effect of this man's work upon me, however, was to greatly diminish my sympathies for people who do not read. (Observe I do not say "cannot read.") While it would be absurd to urge that one person could learn to read as quickly as another or as well as another, it is not unreasonable, in view of recorded facts, to insist that the obstacles to successful reading have been greatly magnified, and rest usually not in the work, but in the worker.

What of those who are spending their time and money cultivating their voices, who are entitled to promotion by virtue of good vocal gifts, and commensurate cultivation but who cannot read? It cannot be denied that they occupy a compromising position so far as merit and consistent culture may obtain. Well-ordered choirs are closed to them, and, for many who are not considering the professional career of choir singing, much of the delight and satisfaction of music in the social circle is denied. To be sure, the opera chorus for the least gifted, and the concert stage for the most cultured are the alternatives, for neither requires aptitude at musical notation; but even there, a consciousness of incapacity on the one hand, or ability on the other, must argue mightily for the difficulty or ease with which the responsibilities are met.

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And now, let the young singer, before he presumes upon the claim to worthy musicianship, ask himself what he knows of music. Let him begin with the song-writers of to-day. Can he name twenty living composers who have written music worth his notice, and also give an example of the work of each; not sing it, but know it, or enough of it to recognize its peculiar strength and value?

Can he name twenty composers who are not living, and even one of the works of each that has been assigned a place in the classic repertory? Can he name twenty of the forty famous oratorios, or identify them with their composers, or recall from the pages the numbers which belong to his voice and compass, and has he any knowledge of the men who wrote them or the circumstances or motives which made these immortal works his to enjoy? And what does he know of the operas and their plots, the cantatas and their composers—many of which, while less in scope, rise to the most exalted heights of musical thought and expression?

And then, what does he know of the literature of his art? Who has written authoritatively and conclusively upon the various points of vocal art? Has he read their works? Has he studied the forms of vocal writing, the authorities in interpretation and style? Such are the requirements of well-rounded vocal musicianship.

It must not be forgotten in this connection that musicianship is fostered and developed by the study



of allied arts, and, indeed, the study of any cultural subject, whether or not it belong to that particular realm of attainment designated as art. The accusation is brought against musicians that "they know nothing but music." It is true that the multitudinous exactions of music as a study afford the student but little time for browsing along other lines of thought. But there are hours, when the student must recreate and divert his mind from the intensive study of his specialty. Then, it would be of the greatest possible advantage to him to familiarize himself with the best in literature, the philosophic trend of history, or the important psychological discoveries. Every bit of knowledge that broadens and deepens his culture as a man, broadens and deepens his culture as a musician. For art is the expression of experience.

Leave the surface to those who are content to remain there, but as for you, be it shame, pride, ambition, or love for your art that impels you, go beneath for all that is good and worth while.

## CHAPTER VI.

### SECTION TWO: RESPIRATION

THE subject of Breathing is treated in musical and other journals with regularity that puts the metronome to shame. Different writers say the same things, and the same writers say different things. Of course, the same things said by different writers are expressed differently, and the writers who say different things, show how desperate are their efforts to keep before the public, and not repeat themselves.

The most characteristic illustration of the attitude of the vocal profession to this important subject was afforded by a convention of singing teachers a short time ago. The subject of the evening was announced as Breathing. It is needless to say that there was a large attendance, and that every teacher present came fully prepared to defend his or her particular conviction. Among the claims that were put forth as final that evening were:

1. High chest breathing, with the explanation that the chest is lifted high before the breath is taken.
2. High chest breathing, with the understanding that the chest is to rise with the inhalation of the breath.
3. Directing the breath, so that it shall feel that it is proceeding toward the back, leaving all the bones and muscles not involved in that effort to take care of themselves.

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4. Abdominal breathing, with the hand placed in the vicinity of the navel, to insure definiteness as to the exact meaning of the term.

5. Spreading volitionally the floating ribs during inhalation, to permit a free play of the diaphragm.

6. Diaphragmatic breathing, without moving the ribs, except by sympathetic displacement.

7. Every conceivable permutation on the above group that the mind of man or woman could possibly conjure up.

And now, facing the fact that the doctors do disagree, who shall be the judge? Or, differently expressed, what is the sincere student who desires nothing more than to advance safely, to get out of this hodge-podge of contradiction? Naturally, he turns to the body-builders, the athletes; and what does he find? He at least has the satisfaction of eliminating the upper chest theories, and also the abdominal, but the agreement ceases there. Two quite distinct systems are advocated by the athletes. One school claims that the greatest endurance is gained by the spread-ribs method, and the other by the method that depends upon the diaphragmatic action solely for the inspiratory process. Even now, he is not quite clear in his mind as to whether he is on the right track in his search for a solution of his problem, for perhaps the breath that will best sustain the athlete is not the ideal breath for the control of the singing voice. So, grateful for the extent to which the problem has been narrowed, he turns to the masters of the speaking voice, the elo-

cutionists. Here he finds his difficulties again multiplied. They may not differ as widely as the singers in principle, but what they lack in this direction, they make up in terminology. Indeed, his is a hopeless search, but somewhere he has heard or read of the stress that is placed upon correct breathing by the great Indian philosophers, they who claim that to breathe well is to live well and healthfully. What do they teach? Not one book, but many, he must read to learn again that he must decide between opposing claims, not as to the value of right breathing, but as to the method that should be employed to obtain the best results; and thus he has run the entire gamut of book-learning, the claims of the great or the near-great specialists, the speakers, and the Marathon runners, and he knows only theories.

Theories are not to be despised. Nothing has ever materialized of any great value that did not find its first expression in a theory. If he has been observant, many questions have arisen in his mind. One is: How is it that the tight-laced girl, who uses only half her lungs in breathing, and who could boast of scarce a hundred and twenty-five cubic inches of breath capacity if she uses them all, can sustain a tone twenty seconds longer than he himself, or why is it that the huge fellow with a voice like a trumpet, and a bellows like those in a blacksmith shop must needs breathe once every six or seven seconds when singing the most undemanding songs, and why is this disciple of the diaphragmatic breath gasping constantly for

a fresh supply, while the clavicular advocate, sitting next to him seems entirely comfortable?

The student who has thought thus far and anxiously, cannot fail of arriving at one conclusion, which is, after all, the only practical one. It will be: I must work the problem out for myself. Being thoughtful, he has come to realize the value of system. His first premise is a sound one. "I cannot hope for perfectly dependable results in much less than a year. In order to be assured of my progress, I must keep an exact tab on my condition." An instance is on record of a student who took his watch, a pencil and a piece of paper, on which he recorded the date. "As I breathe, I can sustain G in full stress so many seconds, in half stress, so many. I find that the fifth above, I can sustain only so many seconds, in the two stresses, and the octave G even less. After many repetitions of the test, he placed the average result under the date for future reference, but he went even further and more carefully into his experiments. He found that the more seconds he consumed up to a certain point, in taking in his breath, the longer he could sustain his tones; and, to his surprise, he also learned that the more slowly he inhaled, the more directly and exclusively did the breath seem to go easily to that particular spot in his anatomy known as his diaphragm. These findings were also recorded on the paper. Thus far, his progress had been ridiculously natural. He had not directed his breath to any place in particular. He had not lifted his chest or



spread his ribs, or worked his abdomen, or pumped himself full, but had simply compared the results of breath taken quickly and that taken slowly, with the result that the slow inhalation showed more seconds of sustaining power, and seemed to seek the diaphragm as the point for the most normal center of displacement.

He also found, that when sustaining the tones to the full limit of the breath taken, he felt a distinct fatigue in the vicinity of his diaphragm. He was really quite happy about this, for the fatigue felt good to him. It was the sort that promised increasing strength and control by much of just that kind of practice. So he determined to continue his work along these lines. After he went to bed at night and was relaxed and quiet, he took a few very slow breaths, and discovered that whenever he gave no heed to how or where the breath should go, but simply took it slowly and naturally, the same comfortable and definite phenomenon was observable.

Each day, he gave another fifteen minutes to the subject, with his watch and paper and pencil, and at the end of a month, to his great surprise, he found that he had gained fully three seconds in every count. This was almost beyond belief, for as yet he had done nothing in particular except breathe quietly, and let the breath take care of itself. At the expiration of two months, he again took up some of his favorite oratorio numbers in which the runs had tormented him because of their length. Heretofore, he had been obliged to

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breathe two or three times in some of them, and now once was quite all he required.

Not only could he sustain his tones better, but they had more vitality, his range had increased, his control was more secure, and quite apart from his singing, he felt better. His appetite increased, and he found he was gaining in weight. He was not the sort of man to abandon an experiment, once he had entered upon it. So he kept it up for fully a year, timing himself by his watch and placing the results in seconds upon his paper. How unnecessary to tell the result! There were no runs in the scores of the oratorio that he cut into quarters or halves to accommodate his insufficient breath. On the contrary, he entered upon them without the least effort or solicitude; for control had become not only a habit but a pleasure to him, and he found that when he had to take his breath quickly, as singers must, the long practice had given him the ability to do so, without the least affecting his sustaining power or control. Now he is so exceptionally strong in the matter of breath control that singers frequently ask him how he does it, and who taught him to do it.

The clavicular lady asks him, the abdominal man asks him, as do also the back-breather, the candle-snuffer, the feather-blower, the rib-spreader, the diaphragmatic pushers and pullers. All of them urge him to tell them what method he used, and they all claim him as an exponent of their particular fad. Don't his ribs spread, and doesn't his abdomen move,

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his back swell, his chest rise and expand, and his clavicle hump itself, and because he can sing in one breath what any of them require two or three breaths to sing, doesn't it prove that they are right? Of course, it does, and it always will. One can prove anything by success, but he answers them all the same way. "I breathe perfectly naturally. I practised breathing slowly at first, and kept a record of my progress in seconds, and finding I was improving, kept it up. That was all." "But you breathe from your diaphragm, don't you?" said a worshipper of that particular fetish. "Yes, I suppose I do when I am asleep, and I never take pains not to when I am awake. But I have never made a special effort to do so when I sing." And he closed the interview by saying: "If one practises breathing slowly, the breath will go where it will do the most good, and if he keeps practising long and systematically enough, he will get all the control he can possibly require in singing, and plenty to spare."

The above simple recital is a fact. Facts make history, and, fortunately, history sometimes repeats itself, which explains why the practical common-sense singer, who isn't obliged to slaughter his phrases by breathing in the middle of them, has a commiserating smile for those faddists whose breath gives out at the point when he himself feels he is best equipped with a reserve.

It is not the breathing rock upon which the better element in the profession splits. For, irrespective of

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the fact that there are as many ways of teaching breathing as there are of seasoning pickles, the public is as ready to applaud real artists when they hear them, regardless of how they breathe, as they are to eat the pickles if the flavor suits them.

## CHAPTER VI.

### SECTION THREE : METHOD

**I**T was a common thing even ten years ago to have the mother who was ushered into the studio with her daughter for a voice test, say to the teacher :

“Do you teach the Old Italian Method?”

If the teacher was quite in need of pupils, he would shamelessly say, “Yes, madame, the old and only pure Italian method!” If, however, he was possessed of that spirit of honesty born of a full lesson card, he would turn politely and say, “Madame, will you kindly explain what you mean by the Old Italian Method?” Madame never explained.

Distorted, degraded, demoralized; sheltering beneath its plausible respectability presumptions of the grossest sort; a scapegoat compelled to answer for every crime in the vocal catalogue; loaded with the stigma of every possible grade of incompetency; a shield behind which ignorance wards off the thrusts of disappointed hopes; a cloak in which charlatanry and pretense enfold themselves, and beguile the unwary and aspiring student into confidences which are followed by despair and wreck. Such is the old Italian method. All because of a name, which, except to the few, comprehends only an indefinite significance, even that being borrowed from the faded glories of a remote past and forced into artificial existence in an unnatural and unfriendly soil. The partially equipped



status of the vocal profession is accountable for this in part; not less, however, than the credulity of the average vocal aspirant. We wish to answer clearly the question so frequently put and vaguely answered, "What is the Old Italian Method?", and in so doing, to settle finally and beyond cavil, the necessity at least for further impositions—and to remove the mask of mystery surrounding the subject which has been its greatest charm.

The Old Italian Method relates strictly to the mode of technically developing the vocal instrument, irrespective of its **quality** or **condition**—the process illustrating a sequence absolutely perfect so far as the uses to which voices are to be put can be related to it. In other words, the training afforded by this system held in view the perfect rendering of the music most in vogue when the system was formulated—namely, the Old Italian Opera.

"Irrespective of its quality or condition." By that is conveyed the truth, which, unfortunately, so many overlook. They associate the Italian method with a certain quality of tone, a certain manner of taking a tone, or a certain condition of vocal attainment in some way distinctive.

The Old Italian Method does not begin with tone production, or the study of quality, and has but little to do with the peculiarities of the instrument; it takes the tone as it finds it, in whatsoever condition, and beginning there, subjects it persistently to a prescribed routine, which routine is as fixed and unalterable as a

system can be made by the combined experience of master minds covering a period of nearly two centuries. This is indisputable. While many—perhaps most of the old method writers allude, in their inevitable and stereotyped introductions, to quality, they, knowing well the utter hopelessness of expressing their ideas in type, proceed at once to the business of singing—that is, of training the voice as they find it by the old Italian formula, trusting to that formula to enlarge, strengthen, and qualify the voice for its prospective use, and, while so doing, to eradicate the defects existing in the voice; and, happily, but not strange to relate, the results are consistent and satisfactory. All we find relating to the old Italian method in the writings of those whom we quote as authority is of no value in the way of suggestions as to how tone formation, pure and simple, should be acquired. Such terms as tone placing, or voice building were not known or rarely indulged in, except as they were alluded to synonymously in the advanced stages of development. As before stated, the system presupposed the tone an established fact, ready to be acted upon, expanded and matured by the old Italian method.

It seems almost superfluous to illustrate, but to avoid any misunderstanding, let us compare the tone of a promising and established voice to a perfectly formed and talented child. The Old Italian Method recognized the voice already existing as an entity, characteristic, and worthy of development, no less truly than one looks with pride upon the possibilities

of attainment of a perfectly formed and talented child. In either case, the process of culture may comprehend infinite improvement and the incorporation of endless charms and graces not even suggested at the outset; but such amplification would shed luster upon the system by which either the voice or the child were developed, bearing no relation whatsoever to the formation of the voice or the gifts of the child. It is to this peculiar power of maturing and enlarging the scope of the instrument that the Old Italian Method is indebted for its glory and its influence. When properly understood and traditionally followed, this influence is as potent to-day as when so generally and successfully practised.

Now, what condition was held to be the proper one, to which might be applied the Old Italian Method? It is clear that the demands of the times during the period in which the system of development known as the Old Italian Method was perfected, were entirely operative. Thus, voices that were ordinary were never considered; no attention was paid to a voice, until it was brought into notice by the fact of its exceptional value, indicated by a strongly asserted individuality. This individuality might be in the direction of quality, strength, compass or elasticity; but, in whatever lay its virtue, if it promised well for operative purposes, it was then rigidly trained by the old Italian method with that end in view, and was counted successful only in the measure that it met and fulfilled the requirements of the stage.

This differs from the custom of the present day, in that there have been great advances along the line of preparatory culture. Voices with little of promise in any particular have, by careful treatment, frequently covering a number of years of patient drudgery, been brought to the condition that would have been called by the Old Italian masters, promising; they could then be taken and passed through the old Italian system of drill for the stage. This is precisely what should be done to-day. This points clearly to the difference in the influence of the times. Then only voices **naturally** most excellent were thought worthy of consideration. Now, so many opportunities for the use of voices have served to develop them to a certain point, and so much has been added to the general knowledge of how to establish and perfect vocal resonance as a foundation for advanced study, that were the technicalities of the old Italian method better appreciated as relating to the already established condition, and from that point properly understood and applied, there could be wrought a much higher average of results as well as many more exceptionally fine artists. The error and presumption of the uninformed teachers of the present day lies in their assuming that this work of primarily establishing the voice comes under the head of, or is in any way related to, the system under discussion.

A method of tone-production that can be upheld as a standard will hardly be found to-day, since there is so wide a diversity of impressionability among voice

admirers. It is only the little people in their canons, who persistently gloat over their hair-splitting, who prate about their methods—the Old Italian, the French, the Natural, the Nasal, and what-not.

The real difference is now to be found in tone-ideals. Some teachers like a particular quality as much as others dislike it. They strive to win the voice to their favorite quality. They know that the flute, the reed, and string qualities may be found in female voices, and it is not surprising that they attempt to shape them to their own ideals, and this is a legitimate point of difference.

Neither is it confined to the teacher. Every quality will find its admirers in every audience. The German auditor will admire a voice that will be a keen disappointment to his Italian neighbor in the next seat.

All truly great tones are characteristic, moreover, not of the teacher, but of the pupil. It is the office of the teacher to so treat the individual voice that its individuality shall not be sacrificed but enriched and intensified.

But we are now on higher ground, out of the canon. Let us stay there. The best test of the teacher is the pupil, heard at the farther end of the auditorium. If the voice arrives there, itself, without being pushed across, and is agreeable when it arrives, the teacher deserves, and will get a good clientele.



## CHAPTER VI.

### SECTION FOUR: THE LEGATO

THE high lights of a picture often serve to so distract the attention that defects in its technic are not noticeable. This is quite as often to be found in the tone picture made by the singer. Behind a brilliant appearance, vivacity of manner, good diction, a beautiful selection, may be concealed numerous faults relating to technic and interpretation.

The most common of these is a dubious legato. Nothing lifts a singer to a higher level than a perfect presentation of this most fugitive attribute of the singer's art. Unconsciously stopping one word to begin the next, making a cadence at the close of each phrase, irrespective of the meaning of the text, releasing the vitality to take a necessary breath—are but a few of the ways in which the perfection of the legato is violated.

The first point we will consider as related to the legato is the action of the under jaw. For a reason which the amateur never considers, the jaw is allowed to move up and down with each syllable. Let us take the word "La" for example. Ask a pupil to make seven repetitions of the word "La", and there will be as many distinct movements of the under jaw, whereas there is no necessity for any movement whatsoever, not even at the beginning, if the mouth is allowed to hang open loosely before the first "La" is begun. In the

beginning, the pupil should be aided by a mirror, which guides him as to the certainty that the mouth does not move, thus making him familiar with the sense of touch which accompanies the pronunciation of the syllable by the tongue alone. It can be seen that the object of this is two-fold; first, not to disturb the even flow of the tone by the action of the under jaw; second, to liberate the jaw and tongue from synchronous activities.

If the "La" at first seems difficult, the other six of a group of seven, all of which should be practised without the slightest movement of the under jaw, will present greater difficulties. They are as follows, and named in the order of their obstinacy: La, Na, Ka, Ga, Ra, Ta, Da. Those who are familiar with Italian, as it is spoken by educated Italians, have noticed that in their conversation, they move the under jaw less than half as much as English speaking people. In a measure, this explains the quality and smoothness that is so frequently commented upon as characteristic of the Italian language. Comparatively few Italian words end with consonants, which gives a distinct advantage, and explains why Italian lends itself so readily to the legato. We express ourselves in a language based upon the same alphabet, and can employ the means which they command to beautify our speech, with the added advantage of most agreeable final consonant effects, if we take the trouble to master them.

Another factor of great importance to the legato is

vowel purity, and the sustaining of that pure quality unimpaired through the entire length of the note to which the vowels are assigned. A vowel cannot be beautiful, if there is the slightest departure from or modification of its vowel individuality. A peculiarity of our language is a great variety of vowel sounds; it follows that extraordinary care must be taken to keep the vowel inviolate, unchanged, pure and thus beautiful, from its attack to its release. Few singers do this, and many are not conscious of the defect.

From the vowel standpoint, a perfect attack and a perfect release, with the vowel pure and properly sustained, comprehend all that is required for the perfect legato. To begin a vowel without making a guttural stroke, without in the least gliding to it from even an imperceptible distance above or below, to end it without allowing its purity to fade, or the tongue or mouth to change until it is ended, and not to end it abruptly, covers the technic necessary to correct vowel presentation, granted of course that the tone is correctly formed.

There are so many words in our language in which the diphthong figures that we must accord a word respecting the use of it. Take the vowel "I" for example. It is made up of the sounds "ah" and "ee." The second sound of diphthongs, as the sound "ee" in "I", is to be heard only at the very end, when the slightest suggestion of it is necessary. (The diphthong "ew" as in "knew" is an interesting exception to this rule.) English words are all too often distorted

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in singing, by using the diphthong in such a manner as to make it sound like two syllables. Play-ee for play, nigh-eat for night, etc., are familiar sounds heard from many young singers, and far too many old ones, all of which effects are enemies to the legato.

We may classify consonants in a way that has much bearing on the legato. For convenience, we will call them vocal, half-vocal, and unvocal consonants. The vocal consonants, when rightly understood, are of the greatest importance. They are as follows: M, N, L, V, and Z. R belongs to this group, but the trilling of the tongue on R is not favorable to the legato effect. The single consonant effect, heard in "th" and "ng" may also be classed with vocal consonant sounds.

The suspension\* of these consonants, or the judicious employment of the vocal prefix, as a bridge across which the tone can be carried from one word to the next, is an artistic achievement, and marks the rank of the singer. Take the words: "Thou art my God"; the "th" can be suspended, the "a" is already in legato form, since the "thou" ends with a diphthong; the "m" can be greatly suspended, with the result of enhancing the effect; the "g" is the only initial consonant not in the group of vocal consonants. It belongs to the second, or half-vocal group, so-called

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\*By Suspension is meant a brief vocalization of the consonant *on the same pitch* allotted to the vowel to which it is attached, the release from consonant to vowel being more or less abrupt, depending upon the intensity of the suspension.

A suspension effect may be obtained in connection with the unvocal consonants, such as T or P by withholding the release for an instant. This use of the suspension, however, is opposed to a perfect legato, but is often employed for an emotional effect.

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because a semi-guttural suspension of short duration is possible. (B, D, and J also belong to this group.) The sentence then is capable of an almost perfect legato, a test of which is a continuous tone from the beginning to the end of a phrase, the possible exception being an interruption made by the final letter of the word "art". Practice and investigation of this kind will reveal much that is worthy of the singer's attention.

We have then among the consonants, M,N,L,V, and Z, that are distinctly vocal; also combinations between two unvocal consonants that make them vocal, such as "th" in the word "thy", admitting of the same connecting suspension that the vocal consonant affords; combinations between vocal and unvocal consonants, admitting also of the suspension; "pl" in "place" is an example; and the half-vocals, B, D, G, and J, which, with the vowels, make connections between words only rarely difficult. Indeed, such a large proportion of the consonants and vowels, either singly or in combination are suspendable, that the slur so often cast upon the English language as an unsingable tongue is ridiculous.

Consonants which classify as unvocal, require a speedy and definite delivery to insure the perfection of the legato. The slow formation of consonants and vowels explains that feature of poor attack known as faulty formation, which is quite as vicious as the slurring up to notes, known as faulty pitch attack.

An important word relating to the technic of the



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legato has to do with that quality about which much is said, but little understood—applied vitality. It would be absurd to say that vitality, applied or otherwise, was not primarily supported by the wisely guided breath control referred to in a previous chapter. But let him cavil who may, vitality, as it must be understood to be applied by the singer, is a mental and nervous phenomenon, which is developed by practice just as surely as is breath control, and cannot be made available without a definite purpose in practice. The physical act of supporting a tone from the diaphragm does not comprehend that higher achievement of mentally picturing an uninterrupted flow of tone which is the only basis of the legato.

The legato, in its perfection, demands also a clear enunciation of words. The tendency is to sacrifice the legato for the enunciation, or the enunciation for the legato. The suspension of consonants and the correct treatment of vowels makes such a sacrifice unnecessary.

The legato is the highest technical expression of vocal art; its lack points with certainty to an undeveloped and undisciplined musical character. Whoever aims to conquer the legato must approach it first from the technical side; once its machinery is perfect, it adorns the vehicle of thought, the art medium, the voice made thoughtful, the thought made vocal. Those who find the legato find fame; pursue it unto the end.

## CHAPTER VI.

### SECTION FIVE: AGILITY

**A**GILITY has been assigned to the fifth and middle round of the singer's ladder, because it is the center of influence in all well-ordered voice development. There is a growing tendency on the part of present-day teachers to underestimate the value of agility as a vocal tonic, the result as a whole being a lack of elasticity and transparency of quality, which carry with them the assurance of endurance of voice, and life-long freshness of tone.

While singers with a faulty tone emission often develop a high degree of facility in execution, the rule holds good in this as in all singing that is not correct; it will result in early loss of voice, or that which is quite as deplorable, a disagreeable sharpness of the tone quality. A requisite of the first importance, therefore, must be the free foundation. Assuming that to be sound, let us examine the technic employed in passing from one note to the next.

A prominent Italian teacher of the old school made the following point on agility in one of the first lessons to a new pupil; To gain speed with ease, you are to remember that there are three wrong ways of passing from one note to another, and but one right way. The three incorrect ways are, first, to aspirate each succeeding note, second, to slur to succeeding notes, and

third, to jar the voice as each note is reached, giving the effect of physical, or glottis accent.

The one right way is to repeat the vowel on each succeeding note, without stopping it on the note you leave.

Then of course, followed the illustration, which was a model of speed, smoothness, and accuracy. The pupil's efforts to imitate the master's effect were by no means immediately successful, but she persisted, and was rewarded with the gratifying result.

In his observations on rapid work with the voice, I recall one that seemed remarkable at the time, but which has so often proved to be true that it is worth telling, not only as a basis of encouragement for many whose voices object to taking a scale with rapidity, but as an argument for freedom, a foundation to agility.

The Italian teacher repeatedly said: "Don't be discouraged, it will come; keep trying not to try; it is your unwillingness to let the scale sing itself that is the trouble. If you get the three wrong modes out of the way, that natural action will follow, and often it comes suddenly. Students who have struggled, apparently in vain, and have gone to their beds discouraged, have awakened in the morning to find a new scale in their voices; and, once they sense the delight and ease of the new method of taking it, they can never lose it."

A pupil, with her face all aglow with enthusiasm because of the rapidity with which she had just dis-

covered she could sing her scales, said to her teacher; "Why, it's just a trick."

"Indeed," he replied, "then, why didn't you do the trick before?"

The young lady blushed, and said: "I meant a knack."

"Yes," said the teacher, "it is a knack, but those who sing with effort rarely acquire the knack, and when the pupil does arrive at the fortunate moment of control, when the obstinate muscles and nerves give way, and the true scale appears, she invariably wonders why she did not grasp the idea sooner."

Another important consideration in the study of agility is group formation. Nerves and muscles can develop a far greater rapidity than can the thought that sets them in motion. If the voice can execute a scale, only as rapidly as the mind can think the action from one tone to the next, there would be no school of coloratura. Hence, while at first scale passages should be practised slowly in order to establish and make secure the "new vowel for each note" principle, they must later be thought of only in groups of threes, fours, sixes and upwards. Singing rapid passages at first with a very slight accent on the first note of the group, enables the student to comprehend and treat such groups as entities rather than a succession of entities. The accent is quickly changed from the slight vocal impulse suggested above to a purely mental concept of accent without the accompanying physical phenomenon.

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It is a comparatively easy matter to go from one note to its nearest neighbor quickly and smoothly; the difficulties are increased when one or two notes are added. The rapid adjustment of the organs to the requirements of a wider range without change of color or stress becomes a matter of difficulty after four or five notes are reached, a practical impossibility when a full octave of the natural scale is required. What shall be said then of the chromatic runs and arpeggios in all their possible mutability, written, as they are frequently, over the entire range of the voice?

How few singers achieve it in all of its perfection; how many crave it or deplore the lack of it. That easy rippling of the voice across the scale, executed with such apparent unconsciousness, that the hearer is charmed into forgetfulness of the months and years of drudgery that have made enjoyment possible. Do you wish to pay a singer the highest compliment? Tell her her scales are true and even, and you have won her blessing; for to attain this perfect smoothness, she has spent, not many months, but years, and it is her greatest pride.

One of the best true stories told of the elder Lamperti voices his opinion of the difficulty of gaining perfect scale delivery. A lady who was applying for instruction at a time when because of his full schedule, it seemed unwise to accept any more pupils, urged him to consider her claims to his interest. She named the roles she knew, the artists with whom she had appeared, and told of what the critics had said of her

voice. He interrupted her by saying: "Madame, can you sing a perfectly even scale throughout the compass of one octave"?

"I most certainly can," she replied.

"In that case, I cannot accept you as a pupil, for you do not need me," said Lamperti; and he dismissed her without hearing her sing.



## CHAPTER VI.

### SECTION SIX : THE EMBELLISHMENTS

IT is difficult to explain why many singers know so little of the group or groups of things that combine to give the vocal art a technic that is exclusively its own, or peculiar to itself.

Take for example, the *Messa di Voce*. The *messa di voce* is the epitome of technic and expression, combining the extremest difficulties and subtleties of both. Those who have not conquered this exacting embellishment cannot hope to reach the top of our ladder. To surmount the exactions of the *messa di voce* as pure technic requires years of persistent study. It is the master difficulty of the art. The writer recalls one of the rarely successful attempts to present it in its perfection—rare, because few scores present an opportunity to exploit it, and because few artists have acquired its necessary control. In this instance, the artist, a tenor, developed an almost inaudible tone through a faultlessly even crescendo to a fine climax of stress. Holding it but an instant, he then successfully accomplished the difficult decrescendo, which brought him to the same stress with which he began. The crux of the achievement was that the same length of time was consumed for the decrescendo as was employed for the crescendo. Try it on each note of your compass—those of you who feel that your control is perfect.

Considered as an adjunct to expression, the *messaggio di voce* reveals the intimate relation between art and nature. Nature suggests a constant deviation from the straight line. The singer who delivers any part of a phrase unshaded violates nature and the most important of all effect requirements. The constant increase or decrease of tone quantity while singing is indispensable to artistic finish. If employed consummately well, it is not often noticed, so perfectly is the ear tuned to its charm. It is when tones are not constantly varied in stress that the voice of the singer is commented upon as being unsympathetic or unmusical in quality. Past belief is the variety of possible effects that are based on one or both of those two technical acts, the *crescendo* and the *decrescendo*, which when joined in a single vocal act are called the *messaggio di voce*.

The poetic description written by Sidney Lanier, in a letter to his wife, after hearing Mlle Nilsson, is perhaps the most beautiful expression of the *messaggio di voce*, in words: "Her *pianissimo* was like a dawn, which *crescendo'd* presently into a glorious noon of tone, which then did die away into a quiet gray twilight of clear, melodious whisper."

### The Portamento.

We come now to the *portamento*. Most writers of vocalises or preparatory studies have given it from two to four pages. It is noteworthy that they have treated the subject indifferently, which is one of the

many proofs that the subtleties of the vocal art are altogether too fugitive to be caught and held by a combination of pen and paper.

Great elasticity and control are required to meet its technical demands. Transferred to the field of expression, it assumes a different and far greater importance. In fact, it almost exactly parallels the study of inflection on the part of the elocutionist, its resources modified, of course, by the necessity of compliance with rhythmic and melodic demands.

As all teachers have been made painfully aware, the portamento is the best abused servant in the singer's realm. The novice makes all his portamentos alike, whether in exultation or despair, whether in pianissimo or fortissimo, whether at climax or cadence. If they are portamentos, they are allowed to pass. Not only that—but they are interpolated at every possible opening, and are just as likely to appear at impossible openings. And, for fear the composition will not be thickly enough strewn with them, they assert themselves at the beginnings of sentences, as well as between words.

There are those who will deny that expression has technic, but let a critical study of the portamento be made in its relation to the thought under presentation, and it will be found an influence to be reckoned with, quite apart from the control necessary to its production.

The widely differing effects resulting from the varied uses of this embellishment can be explained in

no other way than that it adjusts itself to, and is identified with, nearly every emotion worthy of expression. Adding to that the diversity of means employed by composers, not only in the length of notes, but in the distances from one note to another, which they employ to portray the sentiment found in the text, it will be seen that it possesses the greatest elasticity, and that it is susceptible of suggesting not only contrasting, but contradictory conditions.

Chaminade, in her "Slavonic Song", asks the singer to make a portamento of a full octave and a half. Handel, in the first bar of "Come Unto Him", from the "Messiah", on the word "unto", employs the portamento from D to C. The contrast is not only in distance but in sentiment. Let the singer take those two passages and compare them, and he will see clearly the culture necessary to the control of the portamento; yet how perfectly it adapts itself to the requirements of both phrases.

In some cases, the stress of the tone must vanish during the progress of the portamento. In some cases, it must increase. A portamento is sometimes made from a short note to a long one. Some portamentos appear in a composition which demands absolutely strict time in the rendering; others, where the singer is governed in its use by his feelings, as in a cadence or *ritardando*. On many vowels, the mouth should be kept open during the entire progress of the portamento. In other cases, it should yield to the demands of the diphthong, allowing the mouth to change during the

portamento for the purpose of gaining the diphthong effect; and also, but rarely, a portamento may be employed to and from the same note.

Again, sometimes the highest artistic end is gained by closing the mouth entirely, and allowing the portamento to make its ascent or descent upon a consonant, with no vowel effect audible. This, and many more varieties of the embellishment are to be found, studied and mastered. This inflection of singing, the portamento, can be drawn upon to convey, emphasize or add to the refinement or delicacy of the thought which a combination of words is intended to convey.

That group of embellishments which are sometimes classified as "the graces" comprise the *appoggiatura*, the *acciaccatura*, the mordant, the *gruppeto*, the trill and the shake. In their appearance upon the printed page, they defy all of the art conventions by their independence. While the terms or names of each may have a definite meaning, the signs by which they are indicated are most unreliable. The *appoggiatura* and *acciaccatura*, which are sometimes called the long and short graces, are made to do duty for each other at the whim of every printer.

The same applies to the *gruppeto*; the four characters that indicate whether the groups frequently referred to as "turns", are of three or four notes, or whether they begin on or above the note which they leave—not many students, artists, or even teachers are so clear on these points that they can read their meaning quickly, even if the printer has accidentally

placed the right signs over them. Fortunately, the gruppetti, that exceed four notes are not indicated by signs, but plainly printed.

In regard to the trill, very few discriminate between the trill and the shake; and how many are perfectly confident that they know whether the trill or the shake should be on a half or a whole step—how it should begin, and how it should end; yet these points are most important from an artistic standpoint. A slip in any of these particulars of the embellishments is sure to jar on the sensitiveness of the discriminating. Can there be any doubt that the most discriminating are those best worth while satisfying?

The all important idea in connection with the study of the embellishments, is to fix them into the technical equipment so securely that they will be ready for instant use whenever they present themselves in a score. It is not alone necessary to know even better than the printer or the proof-reader what the composer intended, but to be able to execute it without special practice. To do this, the student must make an exhaustive study of each embellishment.

Take for example, the appoggiatura, which is by far the easiest to sing. How did it originate? What effect is to be gained by its use? How many different kinds of appoggiaturas are to be found? In what studies is it presented most clearly? And in what songs or arias do we find the most effective examples of its use? It is not until one has gone deeply into the



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study of such an embellishment that its real charm and value are revealed.

Greater demands are made upon agility and control by the mordent, the gruppeto and the shake. Here the study must be followed by practice, a few minutes daily for years, if the highest effects are to be gained.

It is unfortunate that the impression has gained ground in the last decade, that with the passing of the coloratura opera form, the demand for exhaustive agility study is less important. Quite irrespective of the demand for coloratura work, its pursuit should be increased rather than diminished, because of the influence of all forms of scales and embellishments upon the control, beauty and elasticity of the instrument. More important than all is the study of agility if the voice is, in its maturity, to be exploited in the heavy dramatic vocal forms.

There is no surer way of fortifying a voice with endurance than demanding of it the great delicacy that is necessary to the acceptable presentation of the embellishments.

## CHAPTER VI.

### SECTION SEVEN : DICTION

**D**ICTION comprehends actual presentation of thought through the medium of vocal tone. Its perfection is determined: first, by purity of enunciation; second, by adjustment of word accents; third, by a just distribution of stress in sentences; fourth, by rhythmic contrasts; and, fifth, by phrasing.

#### Purity of Enunciation.

For purposes vocal, let us state clearly here that the terms "articulation" and "enunciation" are perfectly interchangeable or synonymous, both terms meaning the bringing up into the area of audibility just enough of the vowel and consonant constituents of a word to make them all clearly perceivable and none of them unduly prominent. A student's deafness to his faulty articulation is not quickly overcome. It is far removed from his field of consciousness. To omit the roll of an initial *r*, or the articulation of a final *r* will greatly detract from the charm of a phrase otherwise perfectly sung. Allowing the most meagre vowel sound to follow the articulation of a final consonant, will destroy the beauty and truthfulness of pronunciation. It has been quite the fad recently, and especially among choir singers, to indulge in the employment of this most slovenly substitute for clear enunciation. What could be more distracting to a

devout worshipper than to hear a line of a favorite hymn or anthem marred by such a reading as "Lead-a kindly Light-a amid-a the encircling-a gloom-a", which illustration is by no means exaggerated. To tune the ear to these subtle defects requires infinite patience.\*

It is most readily accomplished by going over into the sister realm of speech, and looking into phonetic analyses. It is not quite fifty years ago that phonetic spelling was a high-school fad in New England. How much attention is given to it in all schools now we do not know, but ask a pupil to spell phonetically all of the words in such a sentence as "we will nominate him for president", and do not be surprised if he fails. Teach him that every word that is correctly sung is phonetically spelled, and it will be gratifying to learn that the ear is no longer deaf, but keenly in tune to the finer language effects. It is to be regretted that there is so much left to be desired in clear and beautiful enunciation when its attainment is so easily within reach.

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\*Many of the students of singing who were fortunate enough to be present at a recent recital given at Carnegie Hall by Mme. Melba, must have been keenly disappointed at what to them must have seemed her lack in up-to-date pronunciation. When she gave as her encore Tosti's well-worn "Good-Bye", and failed to say "Good-a-bye", her pronunciation of those words was a vivid refutation of the modern tendency toward over-articulation. Throughout her entire concert, the artist was able to sing her words in such a way that they were understood even in the farthest gallery without a suggestion of that unhappy obtrusion of unnecessary addendas to words. The fact that Mme. Melba was recently invited by one of the great English universities to deliver a lecture on the subject of Diction, enables us to concede that so far as a standard of perfection in Diction is possible, Mme. Melba has established it.

### Adjustment of Accent.

The thoughtful person will probably say with some warmth: "Accent is pre-adjusted;" and so it is in the spoken sentence, which is precisely the point. It is most assuredly an ever-present and infinitely varied factor in the giving forth of sentences; but it is diction that reveals its force. Accent lies dormant in the **written** sentence. It is this giving forth of the sentence, constantly aiming to adjust the vocal forces to the ever-varying shades of thought, compelling infinite control and unceasing contrast that promises correct and elegant diction.

### Distribution of Stress.

What do we mean by "Distribution of Stress?" Let us take an example: "Eye hath not seen", the opening phrase of a solo number from Gaul's "Holy City". Most singers give the same stress to "eye", "not", and "seen", the effect of which suggests a commonplace style. Many repetitions of this sentence should show which of the words are first, second, third, and fourth in stress importance, for four different stresses could be used on the four words if properly sung. The lowest in the order of stress importance is "hath", the highest is "eye". A question might arise as to the comparative stresses of the other two words, "not", and "seen", but the doubt is at once dispelled, when we consult the rhythmical plan of the composer, who has made his purpose clear by throwing the

natural accent of the first beat of the measure upon "seen".

Of course, as a result of this effort to bring some words forward and recede others, there would be the temptation for young students to change the time values of the notes. Take, for example, the phrase, "But the Lord is mindful of His own," from Mendelssohn's "St. Paul." The word "the" is on a quarter note but in stress must be less than the word "but", also on a quarter note, which precedes it. Take the two words, "of" and "His", which fall upon eighth notes. Because the two syllables are less in stress, the temptation would be to make them shorter in time. One cannot change time values without violating the ideals of the composer. Some latitude may be allowed in the reading of a popular song or ballad, but there can be no latitude whatsoever in the reading of oratorio or any composition written with orchestral accompaniment.

We have here selected only a brief sentence or two for our illustration, but let it be positively stated and understood that artists of distinction analyze with the utmost care every sentence which they deliver.

### **Rhythmic Contrast.**

Here we refer to something quite apart from the suggestion for the general tempi of compositions, metronomic hints, or indicated rhythmic variations such as *accelerando*, *ritardando*, etc. These are of

great importance, since they point to the composer's idea of how his music should be rendered.

Rhythmic contrast, however, is best expressed by the term, "rubato", though it by no means reveals its deepest significance. It refers to that power of revelling in the natural rhythm of speech, while in no wise disloyal to the musical rhythm of the composer. One must first get the rhythm of a composition, and then forget it. There is nothing so devastating to art as the slavery to technic. One who obtrudes time signs upon a listener is yet an amateur. True rhythmic contrast can only be gained by reading audibly the words to be sung, then singing them as a monody, noting the slight changes in rhythm which the thought in the text compels if it is read intelligently, and then allowing those subtle natural rhythmic changes to appear within the boundaries of the established rhythm of the composition. The singers who have brought this fugitive accomplishment to a high degree of perfection afford the most convincing argument for its value by the high positions they occupy.

One might justly ask: "Is a singer permitted to use the rubato whenever and wherever he pleases?" and we shall answer only that experience and artistic maturity will afford a much better answer to that question than can be put into words in this or any other book.

### Phrasing.

Phrasing comprehends a marshalling of the technical forces to the end of a lucid presentation of



thought with elegance, truth and beauty. In its simplest form, it is the adjustment of a composition on the score of intelligibility. It bears precisely the same relation to an aggregation of words that an instrumental subdivision bears to an aggregation of notes. To put it more briefly, it subdivides a long sentence into smaller parts in order that the hearer may gather its import without **intensive** listening. If the musical phrase is well adjusted to the text phrase, the singer's task is comparatively easy. Occasionally, however, it falls to the lot of the singer to adjust a lack of consistency, which complicates his task.

Phrasing deals with both form and thought; it stands between the mind which conceives and the technic which reveals. It searches out the truth, and presents it to the ear. Its powers are limited only by the limitations of the one who employs it. Its effect is measured by the quality of the minds which receive it. Phrasing in vocal music comprehends the simplest, most direct, most natural portrayal of thought, sentiment, or emotion, through the medium of a sentence. It plays upon the permutations of vowel color, accent, stress, and rhythm with indescribable delicacy and intensity. It thunders an anathema or breathes a prayer, with no disturbing sense to nerve or brain. Its strength lies in its control of technical forces, and in its power to measure and adjust thought, so that it shall be most effectively transmitted to the minds of men.

It is the thinking singer who finds a place on the

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proverbial top shelf. Thinking never yields better returns than when expended upon the art features which are employed to connect a singer's thought with that of his auditor.

## CHAPTER VI.

### SECTION EIGHT : TRADITION

WE speak of tradition only when it is qualified by its topical association; the traditions of history; the traditions of sects; the traditions of the church, of form; the traditions of literature and of art. When the word is applied to music, we immediately, though unconsciously, perhaps, unite the present generation with generations more or less remote. The mode or character of interpretation of some master mind, not infrequently that of the composer, has stamped upon the composition certain characteristics which belong more distinctly to the individual than to the composition, or which so blend the one with the other, that to depart from the same seems well-nigh sacrilege by those who have been cultured in the art, and are familiar with the precedent. This, in music, is tradition.

Tradition makes overmastering demands upon a student who is loyal to ideals. The fountain-head of ideals in art is usually, as we have said, the creative mind of the master most intimately in touch with it. Tradition justifies itself. It is important to the student that he makes one of the ten commandments of the profession a careful study of tradition. This is of greater importance in vocal music than in instrumental; instrumental music is more philosophical; vocal comprehends a much wider employment of the

mediums of expression, and is in that proportion more truly aesthetic; thus, there is a greater need for the restraining and guiding influence of tradition. The prayer of an alert student is for individuality, but there is an abundance of opportunity for individuality to be displayed after the requirements of tradition have been met.

In vocal music, it is more difficult to retain than in instrumental. After technic is acquired, the idea of a composition is expressed by suggestive and helpful markings as to the purpose of the writer, and the tradition is quickly mastered. In fact, all of the great works have been studied and written upon, until the performer really sees but one path by which it is safe for him to proceed without danger of incurring the displeasure of well-informed musicians. It is true that no crime in art is more easily forgiven than that of departing from tradition, both as to interpretation in rendering, and adherence to form in writing; when the path entered upon opens up to the sense new and valuable vehicles for thought or expression. Always, however, when this occurs, the stoutest opposition is met with at first; the strength of the innovation is measured with the strength of the opposition, which determines infallibly its value and its availability to musical art.

It is not enough that one may imagine a mode of treatment or thought that has in it the virtues of originality; the fact must be established; it must carve out for itself a new and safe claim to acknowledgment.

ment and perpetuity. It must stand the test of disapproval, malignment, and misfortune, before it can lift up its head and proclaim itself a conqueror. These reflections apply more directly to the composer, in a lesser degree to the performer of the great instrumental works. The vocal student approaches the subject of tradition from a totally different standpoint, and is compassed about with difficulties multiplied almost indefinitely.

To arrive at the point directly, let us take an example from Haydn's "Creation", the song "In Native Worth". Tradition has marked it with such accuracy, that to depart from it provokes instant disapproval, not to say disgust. The dignity, the breadth, the nobility are so plainly given in the happy wedding of thought and music, that the greatest artists of the last century have joined in finally giving to it all that could be added by the charm of culture and intellectuality. In this example, not one man, but many have brought to it from time to time all that could be employed to make it a perfect piece of interpretation. When that point was reached, tradition was established. The music, the thought, the words, the elocution, have been tested in all their fascinating permutations, until the type that has been arrived at ultimately, could brook no change of treatment or development; thus originated the traditional manner of rendering the number. Hundreds, aye, thousands, have heard the rendering in its highly developed form from time to time, and from season to season. So this much

beloved oratorio selection has been bequeathed from one generation to the next and the ears of the masses tuned to the ideal artistic rendering by master artists. He who would win the popular verdict must be loyal to this ideal, to this tradition.

Not many years ago, I heard a noted tenor with a beautifully trained voice, sing "In Native Worth" before an audience that one would hardly suppose, from the infrequency of their opportunity to enjoy it, would be alert to detect sins against tradition. The singer thought to strengthen his position with his audience by departing from the old lines, and introducing new and unheard-of phrasings of certain passages, as well as notes, at times, by which he could better display his beautiful voice. To my surprise as well as gratification, his disloyalty to tradition brought upon his head a just punishment for his temerity; only the uncultured in his audience responded to his undignified appeal.

To sum up, then, tradition in vocal music, may properly be said to voice the combined efforts of a succession of conscientious artists, to so illumine and nourish the composer's thought, that, whenever it should be given, it bear the perfect fruit of artistic sincerity. In opera, the line is less clearly marked. The different requirements of stage and scenery, the variableness with which the parts are cast, the incidental features of environment, all tend to leave to the artist a wider field in which to display his originality. Action, not less than environment, while it intensifies



the effect, also tends to modify the purity of musical expression. The dramatic art can hardly be exacted, but withal, there is a certain formula, which, if not adhered to, calls down upon the head of the unfortunate inventor the disapproval of the audience.

After we leave the realm of oratorio and opera, and enter the field of concert, tradition may be said to be lost, or to take a different form. The singer must answer the demands of his audience for loyalty, not to form so much, as to phrase or thought. Here, ideal in the abstract comprehends certain qualities of voice and heart, or temperament. Here, tradition ceases to be the true word; its best substitute could be called the model, and the results, musically, are not so satisfactory. The fault is not more with the singer nor with the artist than with the fickleness of the popular taste. Unless a song or an aria is dignified by its association with, or position in a great work, its chances for a sufficiently long life to admit of the best study of succeeding artists is so slight that the word tradition fails to meet the case. In the world of folk-song, ballad, or song proper, so few have in them a sufficiency in combination of musicianship, of text-value, and of basis for appeal to the intelligence, that the verdict of one generation rarely descends to another, hence tradition applies more generally to the oratorio and the opera.

In all other vocal forms, the individuality of the singer may be said to exert itself to or against his own advantage. We frequently fall under the thralldom

and fascination of an individuality that is so pronounced that it comes to be a model, and all the lesser lights measure their success by the closeness with which they follow the model.

We may take for example the old ballad which Madame Patey, the London contralto, sang with such delicacy and tenderness as never to fail to moisten the eyes and quicken the pulses of her audience—"She Wore a Wreath of Roses". It was the woman, not the song; it was the pathos, not the voice; it was the melting tenderness of her character, not the words, that made her rendering the ideal to which every singer responded, which was held up as a model by which every audience measured the success of those who attempted it.

It has been my aim in thus presenting the subject of tradition to make clear to the minds of students the real meaning of the word as applied to vocal art. The peculiarity of tradition in vocal music is this, that it is and ever will be unwritten. The pen is not its servant; the philosophy of an Emerson, the tenderness of a Cowper, the magicianship of a Shakespeare, are helpless when employed in an effort to place upon the printed page the art and artifice of a song; hence, that which is best worth keeping or copying is not to be found on the shelves of a library, or by signs employed by the plate-maker between the covers of a book, but must be handed down from master to master, from artist to artist, down the avenues of experience from one generation to the next, an infallible and uninterrupted suc-

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cession of perfect renderings by devout personalities. The traditions of vocal music are sustained by the voices, the hearts, the lips, the experiences of the living, and can never be revealed in their truth and perfection by any engraved or stereotyped substitute.

## CHAPTER VI.

### SECTION NINE: ART

SINGING in its highest development, is called an art, and, clearly this is true of all music. But we use the term "highest development" advisedly. The technical feats with which the public are so often entertained are open to question as to their classification, and that gives rise to the question in hand: At what level can technic be said to merge into and lose its identity in art?

Singing is not necessarily an art medium any more than speaking; both are so common as modes of expression that they may be called natural vehicles of thought. Children sing with no idea of being artists or artistic, as also do many grown-ups. The mere pleasure it gives them or their friends is quite sufficient as a motive. If, however, singing has an art value, and is cultivated as such, wherein does art singing differ from ordinary singing? That this question can arise will be new to some: that it can be answered will be perhaps denied. An attempt to answer it will avail little, unless it provokes a personal application of the principles involved, on the part of all those who find themselves interested in it.

Singing a good tone is not art; it is technic. This is equally true of singing high or low notes, scales, the embellishments, loud or soft, slow or quick. They are all gained and perfected by a strict attention to tech-

nical features that must be treated like the technical demands of any other field of effort, studied, experimented with, to improve by contrast and selection, repeated innumerable times, to strengthen the muscular system that governs them, until control is as intuitive as breathing. When this is all accomplished, is the singer an artist? A brilliant scale, decisive attack, sharp contrast in stress, may entrance the listener, but is it art? If not, what is it, and why not?

We send our child to the art school. Three or four years are spent in gaining control of the brush or crayons, learning the laws of perspective and the blending of colors, but the result, though unquestionably answering to the term culture, is wide of the artist. The question obtrudes itself almost unbidden: Is it possible for one to be a great singer, and not a great artist? It is precisely at this point that we are aiming, and we hope by answering that question to inspire those who are studying singing seriously to apply the test to themselves.

Yes, there are many great singers who are not great artists. How frequently we hear pianists who are great technicians, and who have a large measure of success, because of their wonderful technical achievements; but when their work is analyzed closely, there seems to be a striking difference between their effects and those of other players. We would not crave the repetition of the performance of the great technician, while the charm, or magnetism, or art, if you please, of another player is all compelling, and we experience

emotions that are so sincerely grateful, that we embrace every opportunity to enjoy them. This is equally true of singers. There are those with voices so beautiful, and technic so perfect that an indiscriminating audience may be roused to great enthusiasm by their singing. If we concede that they are artistic, we must grant that their technical perfection is equivalent to, or is art.

The reader will perhaps recall hearing two singers who have appeared in the same role. One is a great singer, the other, a great artist. The basis of our pleasure is entirely different. In hearing one, we are enraptured with the beautiful voice and its control, but are conscious of something not entirely satisfying. In the other, the art is supreme. There is nothing left to be desired. Even the glorious tone of the more beautiful voice is forgotten in the perfect satisfaction of artistry. To a greater or less degree, this difference is observable in all singers; one is more artistic than another. In some, the line between technical perfection and artistic consummation is not so sharply drawn. This results in widely differing opinion on the part of the critics, and we thus arrive at the crux of the subject.

Art is a complex of heritage, and a refinement of culture, which, in its highest estate, depends for its appreciation upon a condition of receptivity fully its equal. Such receptivity and appreciation are rare. In a large proportion of audiences, the superlative art reaches are lost. Highly artistic singers are con-



scious of this, but find their satisfaction in reaching the few, and in the richness of their great possession.

Yet we have not fully answered the question with which we began this chapter. We said that heritage, culture and refinement combined to make the artist. We are not responsible for our inheritance, but we are responsible for the use we make of it, and we most certainly shape our culture and refinement. Art begins its growth with the first studies of the singer. In a large measure, teachers are responsible for its earliest development. A sincere desire to sing intelligently, a profound search into the meaning and mystery of music, a putting of one's self and voice into the background, a clearly defined purpose to interpret the spirit of the work, an early understanding of the relation that technic must bear to art, perfecting the one that it may more readily become the servant of the other—these are a few of the influences that can be wrought into the equipment of the singer, all of which tend to his refinement and culture, and place him eventually in the class with artists, who are such by virtue of their understanding and growth into the singer's "highest development."

There are many who claim that artists are born, not made. Those who will most vehemently refute that claim are artists themselves. They will say: Shall our high purpose and ceaseless struggles count for nought? Have we given these years of study and sacrifice to an end that could have been reached without them? And then they will point to some they

know who are far more richly blessed with an inheritance than themselves, and ask, "Why have these not found success?"

Technic is only the vehicle for art. It must be made as perfect as possible. The art itself is a growth. Technic, while performing the primal necessity in relation to art, is developing a far more important quality in the artist than art, for by it he is growing character, without which art is purposeless.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE SUMMIT—SUCCESS

ONE of the signs of success is money ; another, public acclaim ; another, excellence by comparison with those who are heralded as successful. Success, when measured by only three standards, is ephemeral.

Success is not an outward manifestation, but an inward realization. It can be realized by a conscientious review of the singer's own career from the standpoint of the star to which he has hitched his wagon, and how indefatigably he has striven to reach it.

He who strives only for popular and material success and reaches it, has missed the highest ideal of his professional life. He who sings because he feels that he is elevating the art through his culture, and by the sincerity with which he proclaims his message, is identifying himself in no uncertain way with the great scheme of evolution, in which every man is held accountable not for what he achieves, but for the motive which actuates him in striving after success.

Therefore it is better to fail with a sincere purpose underlying the effort to win success, than it is to succeed at the sacrifice of high ideals. The true measure of success will be found only between the covers of the Judgment Book.

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